

What parents should know about pageants and modeling for children

Every parent thinks their daughter is the most beautiful girl in the world. And there is nothing more flattering than receiving an invitation to enter a beauty pageant. But it could cost you a pretty penny, so find out what the contest is all about.

The pageants promise great prizes, big scholarships and fabulous trips. But there are two types of beauty contests. One type involves corporate sponsors and the entrants must meet eligibility requirements to participate.

The other type of beauty pageant makes participants responsible for entry fees, food, lodging, special costumes, travel, even the cost of the award or crown. Often contestants are required to collect sponsor fees or sell tickets and advertising to help defray costs.

Protect yourself

In Wisconsin, there are no laws governing pageants. The rules are set by each contest promoter. Before you get involved in a pageant, get answers to these questions:

- Who are the promoters or sponsors of the pageant? Are they reputable? Have you checked with the Bureau of Consumer Protection (800 422-7128) and the Better Business Bureau (800 273-1002)?
- How did the promoter get your name? Some pageants have names submitted, others simply pull names from newspapers or magazine subscription lists.
- Are there references available from past pageants?
- How much is the entry fee and what does that cost cover?
- Is there a new entry fee at each level of competition?
- Who pays the costs for travel, meals, and lodging?
- How many contestants will be entering the pageant and what will they be judged on?
- What about the prizes? Find out if the value of the prizes and awards will be greater than the costs you've incurred. Based on the number of contestants, and the criteria you are being judged on, what is the probability of you winning the big prize? Or any lesser prizes?
- Do you need sponsors or will you have to sell advertising to participate?

- Where is the pageant held?
Call the facility and ask how long the contest has been held there. Ask if the facility has had any problems with the pageant or the promoter.

Once you have received satisfactory answers to all your questions, then you can decide whether or not to enter your child in the pageant.

Talent/Modeling Services

"I signed a three-year contract with a talent agency with the promise that my young daughter would be given modeling assignments. It's two years into the contract and we've heard nothing, but we did pay a lot of money for services."

This situation starts with a simple postcard recruiting children to be models in magazine and TV ads. Talent agencies play on parents' emotions, getting them to register their children and sign service agreements costing hundreds of dollars. In return, the agencies arrange to hire a photographer, provide copies of professional photos, and claim to submit the pictures to modeling agencies doing business in the area.

But, complaints filed with consumer protection agencies show a common pattern; parents spend a lot of money, most never hear anything from the talent agency after the money is paid; and then the company goes out of business.

These offers involve written contracts and steep fees. Read the fine print carefully before signing the contract or paying any money. Ask for the names of current clients or references from people who have used the services. Always be cautious of any offer that seems too good to be true, especially when you didn't ask for it in the first place.

For more information, or to file a complaint, contact the Bureau of Consumer Protection at:

(800) 422-7128

FAX: (608) 224-4939

TTY: (608) 224-5058

E-MAIL:

datcph hotline@datcp.state.wi.us

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